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DOUGLAS ROBERTS/CAIRO

THE LEBANON CONFLICT: TWO VIEWS
(PART ONE OF TWO)
(VOICE VERSION IN LIBRARY)

ANNCR:

THE LONG AND DEVASTATING CIVIL WAR IN LEBANON WAS APPARENTLY BROUGHT TO AN END LAST MONTH WHEN A THIRTY THOUSAND STRONG ARAB PEACEKEEPING FORCE DOMINATED BY SYRIAN TROOPS TOOK CONTROL OF MOST PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. BUT MANY LEBANESE ARE ASKING THEMSELVES WHETHER THE WAR IS REALLY OVER. HAVE THE PROBLEMS THAT LEAD TO THE CONFLICT BEEN RESOLVED? IN THIS (THE FIRST OF TWO) REPORT(S) BASED ON INTERVIEWS WITH RIVAL POLITICAL FIGURES, VOA'S DOUGLAS ROBERTS LOOKS AT THE OPPOSING VIEWS ON THE REASONS FOR THE CONFLICT AND THE NEED FOR POLITICAL REFORM.

VOICE:

THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT WING FACTIONS AND THE LARGELY MOSLEM LEFTIST ALLIANCE DO NOT AGREE ON WHAT THE WAR WAS REALLY ABOUT. FOR CHRISTIAN POLITICAL LEADERS IN EAST BEIRUT IT WAS A STRUGGLE AGAINST WHAT THEY SAW AS PALESTINIAN INTERFERENCE IN LEBANESE AFFAIRS. BUT FOR LEFTIST LEBANESE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CITY IT WAS A WAR TO PREVENT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MINI-CHRISTIAN STATE...A PARTITION OF LEBANON THAT EXISTS DE FACTO EVEN TODAY...DESPITE THE PRESENCE OF THE PEACE KEEPING FORCES.

INTERVIEWS WITH PARTY OFFICIALS ON EITHER SIDE OF BEIRUT'S NOW SILENT DIVIDING LINE REVEAL SOME SURPRISINGLY SIMILAR VIEWS BUT ALSO A GREAT LACK OF MUTUAL CONFIDENCE. BOTH KARIM PAKRADOUNI OF THE RIGHTIST PHALANGE PARTY AND SAMIR SOBH OF THE LEFT WING INDEPENDENT NASSERITES, BELIEVE THE WAR IS REALLY OVER. BUT BOTH THINK THAT VIOLENT INCIDENTS ARE LIKELY TO CONTINUE FOR SOME TIME TO COME.

MISTER SOBH SAYS THE WAR MAY BE OVER, BUT THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE IS JUST BEGINNING. HE CALLS FOR FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN LEBANESE SOCIETY AND A RADICAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE MENTALITY OF THE COUNTRY'S CHRISTIAN POPULATION. MISTER PAKRADOUNI ALSO WANTS REFORMS, BUT HE ADVOCATES A MORE GRADUALIST APPROACH. BOTH MEN CLEARLY FAVOR A CENTRALIZATION OF POLITICAL POWERS IN LEBANON. BUT NEITHER BELIEVES IN THE OTHER'S SINCERITY.

MISTER PAKRADOUNI CLAIMS THAT THE LEFTIST ALLIANCE IS IN FAVOR OF DECENTRALIZED POWERS IN ORDER TO WEAKEN THE STATE. MISTER SOBH, FOR HIS PART, CHARGED THAT IT IS CHRISTIAN LEADERS...ESPECIALLY FORMER PRESIDENT CAMILLE CHAMOUN...WHO WANT DECENTRALIZATION IN ORDER TO CREATE A SEPARATE CHRISTIAN STATE IN PARTS OF LEBANON DOMINATED BY THE MARONITES...THE COUNTRY'S LARGEST CHRISTIAN SECT.

BUT MISTER PAKRADOUNI SAYS THE RIGHT WING PHALANGE PARTY OPPOSES PARTITION OF LEBANON AND HE CALLS FOR A NEW CONSTITUTION ESTABLISHING A STRONG EXECUTIVE AND WEAKENING THE POWER OF PARLIAMENT. HE ALSO WANTS A STRONG ARMY OF AT LEAST FORTY THOUSAND TROOPS AND OBLIGATORY MILITARY SERVICE.

MISTER SOBH SAYS SOME RIGHTIST POLITICIANS LIKE MISTER PAKRADOUNI MAY ADVOCATE CENTRALIZED POWERS. BUT HE CLAIMS THE MAIN CHRISTIAN LEADERS WOULD NEVER AGREE TO THIS.

(OPT) LEBANON'S POLITICAL PROBLEMS ALSO HAVE A RELIGIOUS ASPECT. AND THIS SUBJECT WILL BE EXAMINED IN OUR NEXT REPORT ALONG WITH THE QUESTION OF THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN LEBANON. (END OPT)

JS/RCS